

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001134

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2016

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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

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¶11. (C) Summary. In 2005, the Thai body politic finally came to the consensus that separatist violence in Southern Thailand is a real and growing problem. That said, government officials and their critics rarely move beyond well-worn generalizations when speaking about the problem. Hard numbers and efforts to measure and understand the violence are missing from the broader national debate. This cable is an initial attempt to present some quantitative figures and analysis on the violence and test some of the more well-known pieces of conventional wisdom. According to our analysis of available numbers, there were about the same number of attacks in 2005 as 2004. The number of attacks per month fluctuates but has remained in the same range for the past two years. More than a thousand people have died in the last two years as a result of the insurgency. Most victims are not Muslims, but Buddhists. Civilians are still attacked more often than security personnel. Narathiwat is the most violent of the three provinces, but Yala City is the most dangerous district in the South. Most attacks are shootings but the number of bombings is rising. Finally, the police have identified suspects in barely 12% of attacks. End Summary.

A NOTE ON SOURCING

¶12. (SBU) "Data" on the violence in the South is plentiful, but scrutinized and corroborated numbers that lend themselves to trend analysis are much harder to find. Our range of government and security force contacts offer a different set of statistics for almost every type of category--further evidence of the stovepiped and competitive nature of the Thai security apparatus in the South. Local academics and reporters further muddy the mix by offering their own data sets, sometimes culled from the same government sources. Furthermore, many of these sources use different categories to organize their information (attacks on civilian officials are often lumped in with non-official civilians) making comparisons difficult. Many of these categories also gloss over qualitative differences in attacks.

¶13. (SBU) Collecting information from direct press accounts of the violence has its own flaws; not all incidents of violence are reported and the local press does not always follow up to see if those wounded later die. Finally, what differentiates ordinary crime from separatist violence? That distinction can be difficult to make in what is historically one of the most crime-ridden regions in Thailand; according to police statistics nearly 3,000 "crimes" were reported in the three southern provinces in 2005, with only a third of these connected to the insurgents.

¶14. (C) Given these concerns, we have looked long and hard at the data available. While not a perfect match, most of the information supplied by government sources generally agrees on overall trends. The best information we have found was compiled by Assoc. Professor Sisomphop Chitphromsri of Prince of Songkhla University in the southern province of Pattani. Prof. Sisomphop has followed the violence in the South closely for the past two years, and compiled his own set of data based on security officials and his own sources in the community. Prof. Sisomphop's information (hereafter referred to as the "PSU" data) is the only set of information we have that traces several categories over the past two years in detail.

¶15. (C) The one set of figures we received that starkly deviated from other sources was provided by Simmons College Professor Zachary Abuza (Strictly Protect). Abuza's figures (compiled by a research assistant) show a much lower level of insurgent related deaths and violence in 2004, followed by a dramatic spike in the first half of 2005. In both public interviews and private conversations Abuza has stressed his assessment that the violence in Southern Thailand has rapidly grown worse in the past few months. When we asked him how he collects and vets his data on attacks (and why it deviates from several other sources) Abuza conceded that he bases his data collection on press sources alone.

MORE FREQUENT ATTACKS?

16. (C) It depends. Quantitatively, when compared to the 1990's, yes. But it is less clear if there were more attacks in 2005 than 2004 or if the number of attacks per month are rising. The numbers vary widely. According to the PSU report there were a total of 748 incidents of violence connected to the separatist cause in the decade of 1993-2003.

In 2004 alone, PSU counted 1,843 separatist incidents or attacks. In 2005, 1,703. But the police have several different figures. According to local police, there were 975 incidents in 2004, with 1,455 incidents in 2005. Security officials have publicly stated that there were nearly 3,300 violent crimes in the three southernmost provinces in 2005, with 1,017 of these connected to the insurgency. But according to an internal police report from Region 9 headquarters, there were 2,078 incidents of insurgent violence in 2005. Separate, publicized Ministry of Interior statistics list 1,310 violent incidents in the last year.

17. (C) The number of attacks per month--probably a better indicator--fluctuates as well, but only by a bit. Conventional wisdom holds that the number of attacks in 2005 is significantly higher than 2004. An initial look at the numbers suggests that 2004 was in fact slightly more violent than 2005, but a closer examination calls this into question. According to our analysis of the PSU data, attacks per month in the last two years average out at 147.5. The 2004 average is 153 with the 2005 average at 142. Three of the four most violent months were in 2004. The single most violent month in the last fifteen years was April 2004, with 272 incidents (Note. This figure includes the April 28 Krue Se Mosque incident, which involved widespread, loosely coordinated attacks throughout the South. End Note.) The most violent month of 2005 was June, with 212 attacks. December 2005 was the most peaceful month in two years with only 42 incidents--as we've reported before, a likely result of widespread flooding. That said, the usual ebb and flow of attacks appears relatively consistent over the last two years. Violence will surge for a month or two to the 200 attacks per month level before sliding back to about 100 per month. What has likely changed is the press coverage of the incidents. Increasing focus on the southern violence as the problem has built may have led to increased press reporting on incidents, creating the impression of a dramatic upward trend that is not supported by the data.

MORE THAN A THOUSAND KILLED?

18. (C) Probably. An oft repeated allegation in both official statements and press reports is that over a thousand people have died due to insurgent violence or police actions since January 2004. In fact, this figure has been repeated for the last year, leading us to observe that eventually, this "fact" would prove correct. Most of the information available suggests that the casualty count at the end of 2005 was about 1,000 dead. According to the PSU data, 1,175 people have died and another 1,765 persons have been injured in separatist related violence since 2004. Police figures vary.

In a briefing in late October, a National Police Bureau official stated that 668 people had died in the Southern violence in 2004, with 450 dead until that time in 2005, for a total of 1,118 dead. Separate police data at year end listed 564 killed and 1105 injured in 2005, bringing the two year death toll to 1,232.

MOST VICTIMS ARE MUSLIMS?

19. (C) No. Another "fact" relayed to us by NGO and Muslim contacts is that the vast majority of victims of Southern violence are Thai Muslims. Indeed, some contacts cite this piece of conventional wisdom to question whether there is a real separatist movement, or whether government forces are behind the violence. According to the PSU report (the only data set that delineates the religion of victims) 55% of victims (those killed or injured) were Buddhist, while 38% were Muslim (the religious affiliation of 7% of victims was not clear). There were 1623 Buddhist victims, 1105 Muslim victims and 212 victims unidentified by religion. Among those injured: 1085 Buddhists, 498 Muslims and 182 unidentified. However, Muslims are the majority of those killed: 607 Muslims, 538 Buddhists and 30 unidentified people died in the last two years.

MOST VICTIMS ARE CIVILIANS?

10. (C) Yes, but statistics do not clearly delineate civilians working in the local government (local administrators, teachers) and other "symbols of the state" targeted by the separatists from civilians without these ties. Police statistics list 18 soldiers, 37 police and 509 civilians killed and 123 soldiers, 130 police and 852 civilians injured as a result of separatist violence in 2005. The PSU report does distinguish between attacks on local

government officials and workers versus other civilians, but it is not clear where teachers--a frequent target--fit into this mix. According to PSU, there have been 488 attacks on local government officials and workers in the two years, with 428 police, 222 soldiers and 1035 "other" civilians attacked. Although not explained numerically, the PSU report states that civilian officials, informants and locals who oppose the insurgency are the most likely to be attacked.

NARATHIWAT IS THE MOST VIOLENT PROVINCE?

¶11. (C) Yes, but the most violent single district is Yala City. According to the PSU figures, 1204 attacks have occurred in Narathiwat in the last two years, with 785 in Pattani and 638 in Yala. The most dangerous districts in each province, respectively, are Ra Ngae (230 attacks), Pattani City (198 attacks) and Yala City (305 attacks); with the latter the most dangerous district in the South. With the exception of these districts--which tend to have 3-4 times the number of incidents--attacks in all three provinces are widely distributed among districts, but tend to cluster along major roads. Police figures for 2005 support Narathiwat's status as the most dangerous province but put Yala ahead of Pattani. According to these figures, there were 608 incidents of separatist violence in Narathiwat, with 446 in Yala and 401 in Pattani.

SHOOTINGS STILL TOP THE LIST?

¶12. (C) Yes, but arson attacks are more widespread than usually acknowledged and the number of bombings may have doubled in the last year. According to publicly released police statistics, there have been 1007 separatist-related shootings, 639 arson attacks and 323 bombings since 2004. PSU lists 1459 shootings, 729 arson attacks and 439 bomb attacks in the last two years. The police data suggests that shootings have increased by a third and bombings have more than doubled from 2004 to 2005. The PSU numbers, however, suggest that the number of shootings has been pretty consistent, but that bombings overtook arson in frequency in May 2005.

POLICE RARELY CATCH THOSE RESPONSIBLE?

¶13. (C) Yes. According to police statistics late last year, out of 1,017 criminal cases tied to the insurgency in 2005, the police have only identified suspects in 126 of those cases, a measly 12% or so. Suspects in 88 cases have been arrested, with another 38 at large. It is this failure to prosecute those responsible that inflames police frustration and helps feed conspiracy theories that security officials are behind the killings.

BOYCE